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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000501

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE USAID/OTI VENEZUELA PROGRAM

SUMMARY

1. USAID'S OFFICE OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES (OTI) BEGAN ITS VENEZUELA PROGRAM IN NOVEMBER 2002 TO SUPPORT THE PRIMARY USG GOAL OF SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC SOLUTIONS TO VENEZUELA'S POLITICAL CRISIS. USAID'S OVERALL GOAL IN VENEZUELA IS TO SUPPORT A POLITICAL PROCESS THAT IS DEMOCRATIC, CONSTITUTIONAL, ELECTORAL AND PEACEFUL. SPECIFICALLY THE PROGRAM FOCUSES ON: SUPPORT TO ELECTORAL PROCESSES, SUPPORT OF A FAVORABLE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT, FACILITATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS, AND PUBLIC CIVIC EDUCATION. TO SUPPORT THIS PROGRAM, USAID IS FUNDING THE FOLLOWING PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS: THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, THE INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE, THE CARTER CENTER, DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES, INC., AND A LARGE NUMBER OF VENEZUELAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS. THE PROGRAM IS SCHEDULED TO RUN THROUGH EARLY FY 2005. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

2. POST HAS WITNESSED ENCOURAGING MOVEMENT TOWARDS A PEACEFUL OUTCOME OF VENEZUELA'S CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS. ONE YEAR AGO THE COUNTRY WAS SHUT DOWN BY A NATIONAL STRIKE WHOSE GOAL WAS TO FORCE THE RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT CHAVEZ. THE OPPOSITION HAS SINCE CHOSEN A PATH FOR POLITICAL CHANGE BASED ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT OF CITIZENS TO RECALL ELECTED PUBLIC OFFICIALS HALF WAY THROUGH THEIR TERMS OF OFFICE. THIS CHANGE OF STRATEGY RESULTED IN TWO RECENT SIGNATURE-GATHERING EXERCISES: NOVEMBER 21 - 24 TO RECALL 37 OPPOSITION MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY; AND NOVEMBER 28 TO DECEMBER 1 TO RECALL PRESIDENT CHAVEZ AND 30 PRO-GOVERNMENT LEGISLATORS. THE TWO EVENTS WERE CARRIED OUT IN A PEACEFUL ATMOSPHERE AND WERE SUBSEQUENTLY DECLARED FUNDAMENTALLY FREE OF FRAUD BY THE CARTER CENTER AND THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES. THE OPPOSITION ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAD COLLECTED 3.6 MILLION SIGNATURES DURING THE SIGNATURE DRIVE TO PETITION FOR A RECALL REFERENDUM AGAINST PRESIDENT CHAVEZ, SIGNIFICANTLY MORE THAN THE 2.4 MILLION NEEDED.

3. IF THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL FINDS THAT THE OPPOSITION HAS MET THE REQUIREMENTS FOR CALLING A REFERENDUM AGAINST PRESIDENT CHAVEZ, AND THE REFERENDUM IS SUCCESSFUL, THIS WOULD BE FOLLOWED A MONTH LATER (POSSIBLY SOMETIME IN JUNE) BY A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION - FOLLOWED BY ELECTIONS FOR GOVERNORS AND MAYORS IN LATE JULY. IN DECEMBER 2006, THERE WILL BE ANOTHER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND AN ELECTION FOR ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS. IF THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT IS ANY GAUGE, ALL OF THESE ELECTORAL EVENTS ARE LIKELY TO BE CARRIED OUT IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF MUTUAL DISTRUST AND ACCUSATIONS BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION. USAID VENEZUELA'S PROGRAM IS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT THE MAJORITY OF VENEZUELAN WHO DEEPLY WISH TO MOVE FORWARD POLITICALLY SO AS TO BE ABLE TO ADDRESS THE GRAVE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CURRENTLY BESETTING THE COUNTRY.

USAID SUPPORT

4. USAID IS SUPPORTING TWO COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (NDI). THE FIRST AGREEMENT PROVIDES \$770,000 TO WORK WITH CIVIL SOCIETY TO HELP ENSURE THE TRANSPARENCY AND INTEGRITY OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES THROUGH DOMESTIC OBSERVATION. THIS PROJECT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED THROUGH A CONSORTIUM OF GROUPS AFFILIATED BOTH WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION. SPECIFICALLY THE CONSORTIUM WILL FOCUS ON OBSERVING: POLITICAL/CIVIL/HUMAN RIGHTS, THE QUALITY OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS INCLUDING ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES, AND MEDIA REPORTING.

5. THE SECOND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH NDI PROVIDES \$550,000 TO STRENGTHEN POLITICAL PARTIES AND ENCOURAGE COALITION BUILDING. THIS PROJECT IS JUST GETTING UNDERWAY WITH THE RECENT ARRIVAL OF THE PROJECT MANAGER BUT ALREADY HAS MADE A NUMBER OF KEY CONTACTS IN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION WHO HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT THE PROJECT.

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17. THE SECOND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH IRI, FOR \$285,000, IS TO SUPPORT THE TRAINING OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE OBSERVATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES. WORKING THROUGH A LOCAL NGO, HAGAMOS DEMOCRACIA (HD), AND IN COLLABORATION WITH THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL, IRI/HD IS DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS FOR THE TRAINING OF POLL WATCHERS. THE FOCUS OF THE TRAINING - WHICH HAS ALREADY BEGUN WITH TRAINING OF 16 TRAINERS - IS ON OBSERVATION, ASSESSMENT, AND REPORTING. AN IMPORTANT EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THIS PROJECT IS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FORMAL NETWORK OF CONTACTS AND VOLUNTEER TRAINERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

18. USAID HAS AWARDED THREE GRANTS TO THE CARTER CENTER. THE FIRST, FOR \$580,000, IS AN INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT GRANT. THIS FUNDING HAS ENABLED THE CARTER CENTER TO CONTINUE FACILITATING RECONCILIATION EFFORTS AIMED AT CALMING THE POLITICAL CRISIS. A SECOND GRANT OF \$100,000 SUPPORTED THE CARTER CENTER'S OBSERVATION OF THE RECENT SIGNATURE-GATHERING DRIVES. A FOLLOW-ON GRANT OF \$60,000 IS SUPPORTING THE CARTER CENTER'S PARTICIPATION IN THE VERIFICATION PROCESS.

19. WITH DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES, INC. (DAI), USAID VENEZUELA IS IMPLEMENTING A \$3.5 MILLION PROGRAM OF SMALL GRANTS, PRIMARILY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH VENEZUELAN CIVIL SOCIETY. DURING THE PAST YEAR THE PRIMARY FOCUS HAS BEEN TO FACILITATE DIALOGUE BETWEEN SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY WHO WOULD NOT NECESSARILY TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SIT DOWN TOGETHER TO DISCUSS ISSUES OF MUTUAL INTEREST. THE 70-PLUS GRANTS TO DATE HAVE MOSTLY SUPPORTED WORKSHOPS DEDICATED TO SPECIFIC ISSUES SUCH AS FAMILY VIOLENCE, MUNICIPAL PLANNING, AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY.

NEXT STEPS - FY2004 FOCUS

10. WHILE PROVIDING A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION WILL CONTINUE TO BE ONE OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM, THE EMPHASIS FOR FY 2004 ALSO INCLUDES THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL AGENDA/VISION FOR THE FUTURE. CURRENTLY THERE ARE MORE THAN 30 EXISTING NATIONAL AGENDAS, AN INDICATION THAT THERE ARE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHO RECOGNIZE THE PRESSING NEED TO HAVE A VISION FOR THE FUTURE RATHER THAN FALLING BACK ON COMPLAINING ABOUT THE PAST AND THE PRESENT. THIS PROJECT WILL WORK WITH THE AUTHORS OF THE EXISTING NATIONAL AGENDAS TO DEVELOP A MORE COMPREHENSIVE VISION THAT WILL THEN BE VALIDATED IN A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS HELD THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THE OBJECTIVES ARE TO INCREASE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL AGENDA - TO ENCOURAGE OWNERSHIP - AND TO MAKE A CLEAR STATEMENT TO POLITICAL LEADERS REGARDING EXPECTATIONS OF THE CITIZENS OF VENEZUELA.

11. ANOTHER UPCOMING PROJECT IS A NATION-WIDE CAMPAIGN TO BE LAUNCHED IN LATE FEBRUARY, WHICH WILL ENCOURAGE THE CONCEPT OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WITH STRONGLY CONTRASTING OPINIONS. THIS CAMPAIGN WILL INCLUDE A HEAVY MEDIA COMPONENT AND STRONG SUPPORT BY CIVIL SOCIETY WHO WILL IMPLEMENT NUMEROUS LOCALIZED PROJECTS IN SUPPORT OF "CONVIVENCIA" - LIVING TOGETHER IN PEACE. INITIAL REACTION TO THE PROJECT HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE, A CLEAR DEMONSTRATION THAT VENEZUELAN ARE TIRED OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TURMOIL AND WANT TO MOVE FORWARD.

12. PROJECTS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION REGARDING ELECTORAL PROCESSES WILL ALSO COMPRISE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE DAI SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM FOR FY 2004 IN ORDER TO COUNTER-BALANCE THE INEVITABLE FLOW OF RUMOR AND MISINFORMATION. ALSO INCLUDED IN THIS COMPONENT WILL BE PROJECTS DEALING WITH CIVIC EDUCATION ON THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. AS A COMPLEMENT, CONTINUED EMPHASIS WILL BE PLACED ON THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A DEMOCRACY.

13. GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE USAID VENEZUELA PORTFOLIO - AND THE COMPLICATED AND FLUID NATURE OF THE VENEZUELAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE - USAID'S IMPACT TO DATE IS HARD TO ASSESS. CERTAINLY THE USG IS BETTER ENGAGED AS A RESULT OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES CAREFULLY COORDINATED IN THE EMBASSY IN SUPPORT OF USG OBJECTIVES. FUNDING FOR THE CARTER CENTER CONTINUES TO SUPPORT CRITICAL ACTIVITIES. AT MINIMUM, AS A RESULT OF THE NDI, IRI, AND DAI ACTIVITIES THERE HAS BEEN INCREASED DIALOGUE BETWEEN GROUPS THAT WOULD NOT NORMALLY INTERACT. IT IS ALSO EVIDENT THAT THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF INTERESTING INITIATIVES THAT HAVE COME OUT OF THE DAI ACTIVITIES. (NOTE: THE DAI PROJECT DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS ARE CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF FOLLOWING UP ON COMPLETED

PROJECTS TO DETERMINE THEIR IMPACT SO AS TO INCORPORATE LESSONS INTO FUTURE PROGRAMMING. END NOTE.)

FUTURE ROLE

¶14. USAID/OTI NORMALLY WORKS IN A COUNTRY FOR TWO OR THREE YEARS BEFORE HANDING OFF THE PROGRAM PORTFOLIO - NORMALLY TO

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¶13. GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE USAID VENEZUELA PORTFOLIO - AND THE COMPLICATED AND FLUID NATURE OF THE VENEZUELAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE - USAID'S IMPACT TO DATE IS HARD TO ASSESS. CERTAINLY THE USG IS BETTER ENGAGED AS A RESULT OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES CAREFULLY COORDINATED IN THE EMBASSY IN SUPPORT OF USG OBJECTIVES. FUNDING FOR THE CARTER CENTER CONTINUES TO SUPPORT CRITICAL ACTIVITIES. AT MINIMUM, AS A RESULT OF THE NDI, IRI, AND DAI ACTIVITIES THERE HAS BEEN INCREASED DIALOGUE BETWEEN GROUPS THAT WOULD NOT NORMALLY INTERACT. IT IS ALSO EVIDENT THAT THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF INTERESTING INITIATIVES THAT HAVE COME OUT OF THE DAI ACTIVITIES. (NOTE: THE DAI PROJECT DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS ARE

CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF FOLLOWING UP ON COMPLETED PROJECTS TO DETERMINE THEIR IMPACT SO AS TO INCORPORATE LESSONS INTO FUTURE PROGRAMMING. END NOTE.)

FUTURE ROLE

14. USAID/OTI NORMALLY WORKS IN A COUNTRY FOR TWO OR THREE YEARS BEFORE HANDING OFF THE PROGRAM PORTFOLIO - NORMALLY TO

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NIFICANT DUE TO THE HIGHLY POLARIZED POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT. THIS IS AN AREA TO WHICH IRI IS COMMITTED TO GIVING SERIOUS ATTENTION. END COMMENT.)

17. THE SECOND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH IRI, FOR \$285,000, IS TO SUPPORT THE TRAINING OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE OBSERVATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES. WORKING THROUGH A LOCAL NGO, HAGAMOS DEMOCRACIA (HD), AND IN COLLABORATION WITH THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL, IRI/HD IS DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS FOR THE TRAINING OF POLL WATCHERS. THE FOCUS OF THE TRAINING - WHICH HAS ALREADY BEGUN WITH TRAINING OF 16 TRAINERS - IS ON OBSERVATION, ASSESSMENT, AND REPORTING. AN IMPORTANT EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THIS PROJECT IS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FORMAL NETWORK OF CONTACTS AND VOLUNTEER TRAINERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

18. USAID HAS AWARDED THREE GRANTS TO THE CARTER CENTER. THE FIRST, FOR \$580,000, IS AN INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT GRANT. THIS FUNDING HAS ENABLED THE CARTER CENTER TO CONTINUE FACILITATING RECONCILIATION EFFORTS AIMED AT CALMING THE POLITICAL CRISIS. A SECOND GRANT OF \$100,000 SUPPORTED THE CARTER CENTER'S OBSERVATION OF THE RECENT SIGNATURE-GATHERING DRIVES. A FOLLOW-ON GRANT OF \$60,000 IS SUPPORTING THE CARTER CENTER'S PARTICIPATION IN THE VERIFICATION PROCESS.

19. WITH DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES, INC. (DAI), USAID VENEZUELA IS IMPLEMENTING A \$3.5 MILLION PROGRAM OF SMALL GRANTS, PRIMARILY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH VENEZUELAN CIVIL SOCIETY. DURING THE PAST YEAR THE PRIMARY FOCUS HAS BEEN TO FACILITATE DIALOGUE BETWEEN SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY WHO WOULD NOT NECESSARILY TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SIT DOWN TOGETHER TO DISCUSS ISSUES OF MUTUAL INTEREST. THE 70-PLUS GRANTS TO DATE HAVE MOSTLY SUPPORTED WORKSHOPS DEDICATED TO SPECIFIC ISSUES SUCH AS FAMILY VIOLENCE, MUNICIPAL PLANNING, AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY.

NEXT STEPS - FY2004 FOCUS

10. WHILE PROVIDING A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION WILL CONTINUE TO BE ONE OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM, THE EMPHASIS FOR FY 2004 ALSO INCLUDES THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL AGENDA/VISION FOR THE FUTURE. CURRENTLY THERE ARE MORE THAN 30 EXISTING NATIONAL AGENDAS, AN INDICATION THAT THERE ARE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHO RECOGNIZE THE PRESSING NEED TO HAVE A VISION FOR THE FUTURE RATHER THAN FALLING BACK ON COMPLAINING ABOUT THE PAST AND THE PRESENT. THIS PROJECT WILL WORK WITH THE AUTHORS OF THE EXISTING NATIONAL AGENDAS TO DEVELOP A MORE COMPREHENSIVE VISION THAT WILL THEN BE VALIDATED IN A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS HELD THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THE OBJECTIVES ARE TO INCREASE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL AGENDA - TO ENCOURAGE OWNERSHIP - AND TO MAKE A CLEAR STATEMENT TO POLITICAL LEADERS REGARDING EXPECTATIONS OF THE CITIZENS OF VENEZUELA.

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SHAPIRO

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